

Calaveras backs plan to revive timber industry

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Recordnet.com

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July 07, 2010

SAN ANDREAS - The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors gave its unanimous support Tuesday to a Sierra Nevada Conservancy plan designed to revive the timber industry and control the threat of wildfires by thinning overgrown forests.

The unanimous vote came despite lingering doubts expressed by several supervisors over whether the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative can really engineer a lasting peace between environmentalists and logging companies. That's something all sides say is needed to break a legal deadlock that has left public forests largely neglected.

"It's easy to say this and then it all gets hijacked," Supervisor Tom Tryon said of the resolution calling for local government, state authorities, federal officials, environmentalists and private industry to work together to make forests healthier and safer while boosting the economy.

Leading the way

Calaveras County on Tuesday became the first local government in the Sierra Nevada to give its blessing to a state plan to revive the timber industry in the region and improve forest health by developing ways businesses can use small-diameter forest materials.

For more on the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Plan, go to www.sierranevadaconservancy.ca.gov/snfci_home.html.

Tryon and Supervisor Gary Tofanelli also objected to making carbon sequestration a goal of the initiative and to the fact that, at least initially, tax dollars are being used to pay for a lot of the thinning done to prevent massive forest fires.

"It can't be sustainable if you continue to give federal funds or state funds to it," Tofanelli said.

And Tryon said that even though the resolution is largely symbolic, he feared it could set a precedent for onerous legislation, because it calls for forests to help sequester carbon and thus reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global climate change.

"Once you get into the carbon thing, you basically have the government in control of every aspect of our personal life and economy," Tryon said.

Supervisor Steve Wilensky is the board's major advocate in favor of forestry industry revival.

He made a successful motion to remove references to carbon sequestration to win Tryon's vote.

Wilensky's district includes the economically depressed former logging towns of West Point and Wilseyville. He has organized and led several initiatives to retrain former loggers and help residents win forest-thinning contracts. The Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group, which he helped facilitate, has engineered an agreement among environmentalists, loggers, local government and federal officials on projects that are already putting people to work.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy is a state agency charged with improving the health of the region's people and forests.

Much of the conservancy's latest initiative is modeled after the work Wilensky and others have done locally.

That's why the conservancy's proposed Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative came up for approval from Calaveras County government before going to other county and municipal agencies in the Sierra.

"We've had the honor of being the first up," Wilensky said.

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